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SUBJECT: TALABANI ON KURDISH EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS
WITH USG, GOI

REF: BAGHDAD 00087

[¶1.](#) (S) Summary: Iraqi President Talabani on January 12 told S/I Satterfield he and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Barzani had agreed on a list of measures to improve relations with the U.S. and restart political progress under the Maliki government. These include eliminating Kurdish public statements that contradict U.S. policy, forbidding KRG comment or involvement in central government affairs except through Talabani's office, endorsing in its entirety the draft of the hydrocarbons law that reached the COR last year, and suspending unilateral KRG oil contracts that have caused tension with Baghdad. The Kurds continue to assess that Maliki's government is hopeless, but Talabani said they are ready to make a serious effort to work with him and to encourage the 3 1 mechanism. Talabani was optimistic on the PKK problem, citing increased willingness from both Ankara and the PKK to reach a political accommodation, Ankara's agreement to a visit by Talabani and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, and the KRG's readiness to take a harder line against the PKK. End summary.

3 1 to Meet Soon

[¶2.](#) (C) Talabani said the 3 1 is attempting to meet this coming Wednesday, although Prime Minister Maliki's health is an obstacle. (Note: VP Hashimi told us on 1/13 that a meeting may take place on Monday, 1/14. End Note.) The President praised National Security Advisor Rumbaie for agreeing the 3 1 could discuss security matters, which previously he had claimed as his personal bailiwick. Satterfield urged that the 3 1's first order of business be to agree on a broad-based, representative team for negotiations with the U.S. on the long-term relationship. He said the GOI team should include representatives from all relevant ministries and political groups, ideally with Hoshiyar Zebari and the Foreign Ministry as the focal point. Talabani also noted progress setting up a 3 1 secretariat, separate from the 3 1 1 "preparatory committee," which potentially would include Rumbaie, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraqi (ISCI) deputy Humam Hammudi, and Dawa deputy Ali al-Adib. (Comment: Talabani this week gave Ambassador Crocker a slightly different cast of characters for this secretariat, reported reftel.)

Kurds Ready For Serious Effort With Maliki

[¶3.](#) (S) Talabani said the Kurds continue to assess Maliki will not improve, but nevertheless are making a serious effort to work with him. Maliki's and the Dawa party's mentality, which Talabani called an Islamic version of the Ba'ath mentality, remains the same, and Maliki's stated willingness to engage the 3 1 merely reflects greater pressure on his government. Talabani claimed ISCI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim this week told Maliki he agreed

with each point in the harsh letter the Kurds sent Maliki on December 26 and that Maliki must rule in a more collective fashion. Talabani expressed his belief that Ayatollah Sistani shared this frustration with the performance of the Maliki Government (Note: A point confirmed in separate conversations with VP Abd al-Mahdi, Deputy Speaker al-Attiyeh and ISCI Heir-Apparent Ammar al-Hakim. End Note), and announced he would visit Sistani after the end of Muharram (January 18). Satterfield asked if a (long-heralded) cabinet change could come as a consequence of re-activation of the 3 1 mechanism. Talabani considered this possible, noting that a more diverse GOI would help improve relations with the Arab states.

14. (S) Ambassador Satterfield said Washington shares the Kurds, view that Maliki must govern in a less unilateral fashion, noting the Secretary,s main point to Maliki last month was that his government could not succeed without seeking consensus through the 3 1. In a private aside after the meeting, Talabani said the USG should "take credit for saving Maliki" by telling him "only U.S. intervention had prevented the Kurds from removing him from office."

Healing Kurdish Relations With GOI, USG

15. (C) Talabani restated his assertion to Ambassador Crocker that the Kurds now support the exact text of the hydrocarbon law that reached the COR last year, without their two previous objections. Talabani added that he and Barzani had agreed not to sign any new unilateral oil contracts--and even to suspend previous contracts--until the central government reaches a viable agreement on hydrocarbons. He welcomed U/S Jeffrey,s imminent visit to discuss the oil

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law. (Comment: We would be surprised if in fact Barzani has gone so far as to agree to suspend contracts already signed. Nonetheless, there is an attitude of greater flexibility on the part of the Kurds that was absent as early as a few weeks ago. End Comment.)

16. (C) More broadly, Talabani said he had convinced Barzani that the KRG must not interfere in Baghdad politics, and that any objections to the central government must come through Talabani,s office. On a related note, the leaders allegedly agreed not to air objections to any U.S. policy publicly, since the Kurds have access at any time to numerous U.S. policymakers. Talabani was critical of Barzani for his public criticism of the U.S. in wake of Turkish attacks against PKK camps in northern Iraq. He concluded that he and Barzani had agreed to cooperate fully with the U.S. and U.N. on Article 140.

Reason For Hope On Turkey/PKK

17. (C) The Erbil meeting with Barzani also produced an agreement to get tougher with the PKK. Talabani said he and Barzani sent an envoy to the PKK with the message it must cease all attacks or get out of Iraqi Kurdistan, and threatening to mobilize KRG forces unless the PKK complies. Satterfield stressed the ongoing need for aggressive Iraqi Kurdish measures against the PKK, and Talabani affirmed the KRG,s moves to limit its finances and freedom of motion would continue. Talabani added the PKK had sent a letter to Prime Minister Erdogan through the KRG and TNIO chief Taner, which had yielded Taner,s request to talk to PKK leaders a month later. The Iraqi Kurds had provided contact information for PKK leaders in Europe, leading to discussions in Brussels which both sides said were productive. Talabani said some in the Turkish government oppose these talks, and requested that Washington encourage Ankara in this endeavor.

18. (C) By and large, Talabani described an increasingly

encouraging attitude from the Turkish government. It had agreed to invite him in February to Ankara, and welcomed KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani to join the delegation. Emre Taner,s conciliatory private stance, in Talabani,s view, reflects the view of Prime Minister Erdogan. Turkish officials had agreed to improve cross-border trade relations and even said they do not oppose "federation" in Northern Iraq, though they avoided the term "Kurdistan" and qualified that the federation should include neither Kirkuk nor a PKK presence. Talabani still called it a step forward, and Satterfield said the USG has also heard a new and unprecedented tone from the Turkish General Staff suggesting it might/might consider a more broadly based approach to combatting the PKK that incorporated political, economic, and social elements.

Iran Trading PKK Aid for PJAK Ceasefire?

19. (C) Leaning in and speaking softly, Talabani said Iran is helping the PKK. Unspecified Iranian leaders had held a meeting to work out a new policy toward Kurdish insurgents, and recently had increased contact with the PKK and allowed its fighters greater freedom of movement and treatment in Iranian hospitals. In return, the PKK allegedly halted PJAK activity against Iran. Talabani claimed Tehran for the moment has no objection to PJAK remaining in place as long as attacks halt. The President suggested Turkey should know this, as it demonstrates the consequences of "stalling" on a PKK resolution.
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